



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, January 3 – 9, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Lance and Bradley conducted snow tracking surveys the week of Jan 5th - 9th. Areas surveyed were: East Fork Rock Creek/Georgetown Lake area, Anaconda area, Lima/Big Sheep Creek, Big Hole valley west of Wisdom, and Fleecer Mtn. Snow tracking conditions were poor due to fresh snowfall early in the week and rain/melting snow during the latter half of the week. A couple sets of tracks were found in the Georgetown Lake area but no wolf sign was turned up in the other areas.

Enhanced efforts to get more accurate counts on known wolf packs and to investigate clusters of public wolf reports to verify the existence of new wolf packs are underway now that the hunting season is over and snow cover is persistent. However, the bitter cold temperatures have hampered ground-based field work and flights due to human safety factors. Efforts will be ongoing through the end of the month and likely into January.

Final 2008 minimum estimates of the number of wolf packs, total wolves, breeding pairs, the number of confirmed livestock killed by wolves, and wolves killed to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be available in early March 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed and made available to the public. Until then, all media reports of wolves and/or livestock losses should be interpreted with a dose of caution, as numbers provided to the media have been preliminary estimates.

Flights: Laudon flew in northwest Montana on Jan. 9<sup>th</sup>.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices,

many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On the 4<sup>th</sup>, a 700lb steer calf was confirmed killed by wolves on private land near Hall on Sunday, January 4th. WS reported tracks of 2 wolves at the depredation site. This same ranch has experienced two other confirmed depredations in the past year. Two wolves were removed from the Flint Creek pack after the first depredation on this ranch in January 2008. A second depredation was confirmed in October. It's possible these 2 wolves are a remnant of the Flint Creek pack. Trapping to radio-collar is not feasible at this time due to cold temperatures. Due to the history of repeated conflicts on this ranch FWP has authorized WS to remove 2 wolves from the area.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, WS confirmed that a calf was killed on private land in the Grasshopper Valley (Pioneer Mtns, Big Hole area). Tracks of at least 5 wolves were documented. WS has been authorized to lethally remove 2 wolves and a kill permit was issued to the livestock owner. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1 wolf was killed.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, WS investigated a dead calf on private land in the Murphy Lake pack territory. It was not killed by a predator.

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, WS completed control efforts when an adult male wolf was killed on the ranch where there ongoing sheep / goat depredations since September. It weighed 112 pounds. The kill permit has been canceled.

### **Outreach and Education Activities**

*Catch up:* Back in December, Lance attended the Valier / Pondera Sportsmen / working group meeting. He gave an update on the wolf program and learned more about the local area. About 30 people attended.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, Asher, Sime and WS Specialist Jim Rost attended a meeting of the Upper Yellowstone Conservation District in Emigrant. Updates about the status of delisting, aspects of the previous delisting litigation, the state program, local wolf activity in the Paradise Valley, the process to investigate suspected wolf depredations and to seek reimbursement were provided. There was a very good question / answer / discussion session and about 45 people attended. The next meeting agenda will include the topic of range rider programs.

It is getting to be the time of year when wolves disperse in search of mates just ahead of the breeding season. Wolves can act aggressively towards domestic dogs and kill dogs at any time of year, but that is especially the case during the wolf breeding season when wolves are inherently more aggressive towards each other and compete for breeding opportunities. During the months of December – February, FWP and WS notice an increase in wolf-dog encounters for domestic dog breeds. FWP reminds people that when wolves are in the area, please be aware that they may attack or injure dogs. It often helps to keep dogs in secure kennels or inside buildings at night and to not let them roam freely when humans are not around. When fresh wolf sign is found, place dogs on restraints and keep supervised. The 10j rule across the southern Montana Experimental Area allows individuals to harass or kill a wolf attacking or molesting their livestock and stock animals including pets. Across northern Montana in the Endangered Area, federal regulations do not allow the hazing, harassing or killing of wolves by private citizens. If you have concerns or problems with wolves close to your residence or your domestic livestock or pets, please inform the wolf specialist or FWP Office nearest you.

## **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

## **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, FWP law enforcement retrieved a wolf carcass from private land south of Jackson (Big Hole Valley) off of Hwy 278. State and federal law enforcement authorities are investigating the cause of death and are seeking information from the public. Anyone with any information is encouraged to call TIP-MONT (800-847-6668), USFWS Agent Rick Branzell at 406-329-3000 or FWP game warden Rick Schmauch at 406-683-4258. Callers can remain anonymous or confidential and may be eligible for a reward upon conviction of the individual(s) responsible for these crimes.

## **Other**

### *NEW -- Delisting Update:*

The USFWS public comment period on its February 2007 proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains closed on November 28 2008. USFWS has reviewed all the comments and other new information provided by the public and subject area experts. The final delisting rule on whether and where to delist wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains is being reviewed in Washington DC. Information about the delisting proposal is available at the USFWS northern Rocky Mountains wolf website: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>. A decision is expected in the near future.

### *Current Management in Montana:*

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### *Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:*

The terms of several Board members appointed by Governor Schweitzer and selected from the list provided by the FWP Commission expired on January 1, 2009. FWP and the FWP Commission will initiate a search for their replacements.

With the funds available in 2008, the Board decided to pay claims for dead livestock that USDA Wildlife Services determined as a "confirmed" or a "probable" wolf-related death. In addition, the Board decided to pay claims for injured animals investigated by USDA Wildlife Services that subsequently died as a result of a "confirmed" or a "probable" wolf-related incident.

The Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Program ran out of funds for confirmed and probable livestock loss payments for 2008, despite supplemental donations from the Montana Cattlemen's Association, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Livestock owners are still encouraged to send in their loss claims to LLRMP. Claims will be processed in the order they are received and payments will be made as funding becomes available. Currently, no funds are available for mitigation efforts but we hope to include this area in the future. If you are aware of any potential funding sources, please contact the LLRMP office.

George Edwards, the Program Coordinator is preparing a 2008 year-end report.

The bill sponsored by Montana's Senator Tester to fund a grant program for reimbursement of wolf-losses and proactive projects was included in an Omnibus Public Lands Bill that contains more than 150 public lands, water and resources bills. The U.S. Senate passed the bill and it is now in the U.S. House of Representatives. It is contained within S22.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.